

ATLANTA URBAN CORPS

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file

August 28, 1969

Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.
Mayor's Office
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Mayor Allen:

As we sat in your office Tuesday telling you about the Urban Corps, its fulfillment and its frustrations and tried to answer questions you posed to us about Atlanta's problems; you kept quietly shaking your head saying: "Write it down. Write it all down." So I am taking you for your word and I am writing it down.

I don't know exactly what I want to say to you, Mayor Allen, but I know there are numerous things which need to be said-if only for my own peace of mind.

You must not let the Urban Corps fail. I'll try, as best I can to tell you why.

First, I am a college student. I am what some would call a privileged child- because I am getting a college education. But I think this is a misconception. College today is not a luxury, as it once was; it is a necessity and every year its need becomes greater. No longer will college educated people become the upper and upper-middle classes. They will be the middle class-the backbone of our country-the inhabitants of our cities. But these college students-this emerging middle-class will be different from the one which exists today. They will be more intelligent, more aware, and more concerned. But why and how? This is not something which happens spontaneously. This is something which happens when a student is able to realize himself as a person...when he is able to realize that those around him are people...and finally that even those he doesn't know, those whom he'll never see are people too...and he will appreciate them as he appreciates himself.

At a campus college, a student can feel a part, he can start to feel these realizations much more than a student who is not on a campus.

Allow me to give you a case in point. Now I speak for myself and from personal

experience-but I think I speak for a vast number of today's college students. My first year at school, I was at a campus college. It was a new and a broadening experience and I loved it. But then financial problems arose and I had to come home to Atlanta and find a job. The first year it was not too bad. I was still experiencing "newness" at a new school and a new job. My mind was open and I was intellectually aggressive. But then something happened. The "newness" wore off and I found myself trapped. I was in a non-stimulating job and my college courses were becoming more and more mundane. By the time I reached my junior year-it took me almost 4 years to do so-I realized that I was intellectually and even socially retarded. I was like a middle-aged spinster at the tender age of 22 and I did things more out of habit than anything else. And then it happened, I had a sociology course in which I was required to do "field work." It was great-it was relevant-it was exciting and it was stimulating. So much so that I worked part-time on the project while holding down a full-time job and carrying 10 hours at school. About the time this project ended, I inadvertently became involved in another "field work project" indirectly related to a course in which I was required to do a child study. Then things began to happen. I began to attend "inner collegiate meetings" with others who were interested in "community service." At one of these meetings I was introduced to the Urban Corps concept.

I was immediately sold. Coming from a conservative, middle-class family and never having the opportunity to be influenced by "liberals" on a campus I frowned on things like VISTA and the Peace Corps-but the Urban Corps-it sounded great.

I love Atlanta. Atlanta is my home and I hope it will always be. I want to see Atlanta grow and prosper and I want to help it attain its goals. What better way is there, I thought, than to become involved in Atlanta now-constructively involved and be more than just a voting citizen.

Well, in this summer in the Urban Corps, I haven't done anything earth shaking in Atlanta. But Atlanta, and primarily a group of concerned students in Atlanta, have done something earth shaking to me. They have made me become aware. Aware of myself, aware of my city, my state, my country and "my" people.

I will no longer be content to sit around and bemoan my fate and the fate of all as I did for six years in school. I'll want to do something-as little as it may seem-as little as it may be-at least I'll be doing something.

This summer I did something small. I helped to plan the Service-Learning Conference. The conference which you and the United States Commissioner of Education attended. I helped to promote the service-learning concept. It seemed like such a small, such an insignificant thing. But it has people all over the country buzzing. People are looking to us-to Atlanta...asking us questions, seeking material and information. "Service-Learning" has become almost a "household term" and people want to know about it and find out how they can apply it.

When we can tell them about the Urban Corps and show them that the Urban Corps is embodying and emulating the service-learning idea they are satisfied. They understand and they want to try it themselves. From California to New Jersey

people are looking to Atlanta-looking to something which is being done. Small as it may be it is something. It is a start. It is a way to make students-college students-those who will someday be the backbone of America-beome invilved-constructively-rather than destructively, as they are in so many places. They are envious of Atlanta-and now-as so many times before people are looking to us as the leader.

Maybe, Mayor Allen, the question is not so much-Can the City of Atlanta afford to have the Urban Corps-as Can the City of Atlanta afford not to have the Urban Corps?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Babs Kalvelage".

Babs Kalvelage
Atlanta Urban Corps Intern

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